

Mr. KIRK . Mr. Speaker, the Nation has been focused on the war declared by Hezbollah against Israel this past week. And while most of the media focused on stories of the conflict in Israel or Lebanon, they have not covered an aspect of the story critical to our fellow citizens, the protection and evacuation of American citizens from this conflict.

On the day that Hezbollah started this war, we estimated that there were over 20,000 Americans in Lebanon.

I want to first commend our ambassador in Lebanon and the U.S. embassy team in Beirut for rapidly assembling the plans and data on the Americans to be saved. The U.S. Government regularly plans and sometimes executes what is called a noncombatant evacuation operation, or NEO in Pentagon parlance, to rescue Americans abroad. The scale of the Lebanese NEO was very, very large. This operation, assembled on very short notice, responded remarkably to a rapidly changing, massive movement of our fellow citizens.

Some of the unsung heroes of the Lebanon NEO are the men and women of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. I want to give special thanks to the crews of the USS *Nashville*, the USS

Tr

*enton*,

and the USS

*Whidbey Island*.

Along with the merchant vessel

*Orient*,

the crews of these U.S. navy vessels rescued thousands of Americans from Lebanon over the last several days. The crews of these ships were backed by U.S. Marines flying helicopters to save the people in most urgent need.

I also want to thank the men and women of the U.S. Transportation Command who arranged military airlifts for Americans living in Cyprus, and now Turkey, to complete their trips home to the U.S.A.

We must also note the outstanding contribution of the State of Maryland and its governor, Governor Ehrlich, who welcomed them at Baltimore Washington International Airport.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. John Michael of my district called me from Lebanon to ask for his support. I arranged for his registration and quick contact with the U.S. embassy there. Thanks to the work of the United States Navy, the Marine Corps, the State Department and the Transportation Command, Dr. Michael, his wife Christine and their children, Daniel, Ramson, Edessan and Kamber, all from my district, were caught in Lebanon, but now were rescued by the U.S. military and State Department. But for this operation, they might still be in harm's way, but thanks to the work of these professionals, the men and women of the State Department, Navy and Marine Corps, they are home in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, we have saved over 5,000 Americans to date, and I am told today that the number of Americans seeking to leave Lebanon is now declining. We will soon be the first Nation to use this large logistical effort to begin a massive humanitarian aid lift to support the people of Lebanon itself.

Mr. Speaker, take a moment tonight to thank the young Americans who serve on the *Nashville*, *Whidbey Island* and *Trenton*.

Due to their training and professionalism, they were there exactly when thousands of their fellow American citizens needed them to escape from Lebanon.